

Impassioned Protest of La Boetie.

citizens, with every mark of mourning and contrition, to the choir of the cathedral of St Andrew. The councillors were further compelled to burn the charters of the rights and privileges of the city with their own hands, and pay a fine of 200,000 livres. The bells of the churches were removed, and the town house destroyed. Equal barbarity was practised against the inhabitants of the neighbouring districts, two of their leaders being crowned with red-hot iron crowns and broken on the wheel. Finally, justice and gentlemanly *amour propre* being sufficiently honoured by these brutalities, the privileges of Bordeaux were shortly after restored, and the *gabelle* commuted for a payment of 1,200,000 livres by the rebellious provinces. This act of grace only made the tax more burdensome for the non-exempted districts.

The horrible visitation left its mark not only on the memories of the time; it called forth an impassioned protest against the tyranny of kings, which is remarkable as the first literary expression, in France, of the anger of an outraged people. It was not written by one of the people, but by an educated man, who to the culture of letters added the verve of public spirit and an intense sympathy with popular suffering. The author was a councillor of the Parliament of Bordeaux, the beloved friend of his fellow-councillor Montaigne, and like him an ardent disciple of the wisdom and poetry of classic antiquity. It is all the more significant on this account, for in this respect it anticipates the eighteenth century, is an earnest of a time when injustice and inhumanity were to find their aggressor in the highest intellect and soul of France. I refer to the "Centre Un," or "Discours sur la Servitude Volontaire" of La Boetie. It is a juvenile production, for it was written at the age of twenty-two. It is more philippic than philosophy—belligerent, doctrinaire, and intolerant, but instinct with justice and sympathy. It has, nevertheless, a far greater interest than its hostile critics, who have read it without reference to the events at Bordeaux, will allow—the interest, not of a political treatise but of a passionate protest against injustice and oppression, reeking with the blood of the people. To be understood, it must be read in the light of these events, and as a denunciation of them its language is none too strong, though it is more denunciatory than practical,